

REVIEWS OF BOOKS

Birds from Northern Thailand, By James C. Greenway Jr.

A survey of the birds, collected by J. A. Griswold (research association of the Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard), and member of the Asiatic Primate Expedition—organized by H. Coolidge in 1937—has been published by Greenway. Although 1060 birds were actually collected, the report only deals with over 70 *genera* and additional species, totalling 87 forms of special interest (see *Bulletin Museum of Comparative Zoology* 87, 3, 167-194; Dec. 1940; Harvard.)

As known to those familiar with Northern Thailand, the mountains usually rise abruptly from the lowlands or ricefields of the plains, which are "as unsuited to most mountain birds as an ocean." Of special interest is the observation that *genera* peculiar to these mountains are also distributed through the mountain-ranges of the neighbouring countries, such as Tonkin and Laos of Indochina, East to Western China, Burma (including Tenasserim), Malaya, as well as the Himalayan region.

Though conclusive comparisons of bird-series from topotypical localities of northern Thailand and Burma were impossible, the subspecies, according to Greenway, apparently vary in a marked manner, being not characteristically intermediate. This type of "insular" variation e. g. color-varieties, illustrated especially by forms of *Mesia argentauris* and *Garrulax erythrocephalus*, is evidently not closely connected with evolution, although the characters are transmitted through the genotype—the processes of transmission being still undisclosed. Obviously isolation is the one prerequisite known for this insular and discontinuous type of variation. In connection with this survey Greenway consulted both such experts as Deignan, Schauensee, Mayr, as well as the collections of the U. S. Nat. Museum, of the Acad. of Nat. Sciences in Phila., and of the Am. Mus. of Nat. History of New York.

Greenway reports very striking post-mortem changes, especially in certain bird groups, e. g. *Stachyris*, "old skins, as usual, becoming browner and less olivaceous." ; *Siva strigula cast. H.*: birds in worn plumage are much grayer than those in fresh plumage; other

specimens he calls very worn and "foxed."; females of *Muscicapula Hyper. Hyper. B.* are somewhat more olive, particularly on the back, "undoubtedly due to post-mortem change." After discussing the Eastern forms of *Orthotomus sutorius* in some detail, he emphasizes the confusion in this group, due to the poorly marked characters of the subspecies, the paucity of material from topotypical localities in museums, stating that his own series is possibly inadequate. "Even with 6 specimens, representatives of every season, from Fukien, it may be found that the more buffy underparts, apparently diagnostic in this series, may disappear with more material."—Other examples of this welcome critical attitude of his own work could be quoted. In connection with 2 breeding birds of *Aethopyga Niplensis Angka. R.* the collector's notes, here quoted, contain the significant statement": In the two nests which I observed being built the female did all the work."

Of particular interest are finally the following observations of

1: *Microtarsus atriceps cinereoventris* (Blyth), being the first record of the gray phase of this species in Thailand. The specimen, collected near Chiang Dao has a gray breast with indistinct yellow edges to the feathers, (the gray phase being but a mutation of this slightly larger, northern form of *atriceps*).

2: *Cochoa purpurea* Hodgson, collected on Mt. Saket (1280 ft.), another first record of this bird for Thailand, though it had been previously observed in Tonkin and the hills from Assam through those of central and south Burma to Tenasserim.

3: *Cyanoptila cyanomelana cumatilis* Thayer Bangs, being only provisionally given to a single specimen collected on Mt. Nangkao (2800 ft.). This form evidently has never before been collected in Thailand, but Greenway does not deem it wise to describe it for the threefold reason: lack of general knowledge concerning it, ignorance where it breeds, considerable individual variation, known to exist in this group of birds. The original will be found valuable, both by collectors and students of birdlife in Thailand. (Some comparisons of Thai birds with those collected on Mt. Kina Balu of North Borneo, are found in the succeeding report by James L. Peters, in the same Bull. p. 195-211).

Revision of the Eastern Asiatic Myrsinaceae, By E. H. Walker

After 10 years of intensive study, carried on at the Smithsonian Institute, Walker presents an elaborate taxonomic survey of the Eastern Asiatic representatives of a botanical family. While Engler-Gilg in their *Syllabus of Plantfamilies* (1912) limit the brief characterisation of the whole family to but 17 lines, the author's exemplary record embraces 258 pages and 37 striking line drawings, illustrating the main characteristics. (see *Philippine Journ. of Science* vol. 73, Nos. 1-2, 1940).

The work was undertaken on account of the general confusion observed by Dr. Merrill, director of the Arnold Arboretum, in Herbarium collections of this family; Merrill also had found the identification of Eastern Asiatic specimens from literature data "exceedingly unsatisfactory." Walker confirms this confusion and also point out the lack of coordination in the various treatments of the *Myrsinaceae* of Eastern Asia, making a revision necessary. In as much as the representatives of Indo-China have recently been described by Pitard in Lecomte's *Flora générale de l'Indo-Chine*, vol. 3, 765-877, 1930, and those of Thailand by Fletcher in *Craib's Florae Siam. enum.* vol. 2, 325-352, 1938, Walker limits himself mainly to the Chinese species.

In his historical review he refers to the adoption of the name *Ardisiaceae* by the Japanese botanist Nakai, as this name was first used in 1810 by de Jussieu. However, comments Walker, *Myrsine Linn.* is the oldest recognized genus, and article 23 of the International Rules of Botanical Nomenclature, Cambridge 1930, states that "names of families are taken from the name or former name of one of their genera and end in-aceae." There seems, therefore, no reason to change *Myrsinaceae*, based on *Myrsine Linn.* Nakai, followed by other Japanese botanists, also rejects the genus-name *Ardisia*, because of the priority of the name *Bladhia*, and on account of certain morphological differences of the American species. Walker, however, found no characters, justifying the generic separation of the New and Old World species.

The *Myrsinaceae*—with the exception of *Ardisia primulifolia*-, are woody plants, shrubs, trees or vines, are related to the Primel

family and are characterised by a solitary seed (only *Maesa* having more seeds in the fruit). Walker has used floral and vegetative characters, whenever possible, "because these are the characters usually present in flowering, fruiting and sterile specimens,—and because, after all, keys are essentially the tools for identifying specimens." Every species, included in this revision, has been re-described by Walker, according to a uniform pattern, by the use of a printed blank, on which are recorded the characters of similar species—with a paragraph added to the citation of the specimens, giving the principal recognition characters. The treatment, the author says, is in many respects tentative and essentially conservative as, unfortunately, no fieldstudies whatsoever were possible. The descriptions often leave out such useful characters as those of fruits and seeds, obviously missing from the specimens examined, as well as all reference (with a single exception) to the local uses, economic, medicinal, food or ornamental, of the plants or their products. Such data, we hope, will be supplied, when fieldstudies become possible.

Walker described 19 Asiatic species of *Maesa*: 1 of *Aegiceras*, 53 of *Ardisia*, 18 of *Embelia*, 4 of *Myrsine* and 6 of *Rapanea*. In addition he discusses critically under every *genus* uncertain and excluded species. He gives finally for purposes of record and checking a long list of cited specimens. Of supplementary interest, we feel, is the enumeration of species in this family, recorded in the book *Chinese Medicinal Plants* from the *Pen Ta'ao Kang Mu*, by B. E. Read, 3rd ed. 1936, published by the *Peking Natural History Bulletin*. The roots of 3 *Ardisia* species, and the leaves and stems of one *Maesa* species are used in medicine; one *Maesa pirifolia* Miqu. is reported to contain saponin. Finally, the leaves of one, *Maesa parvifolia* A. DC., according to statements one of Walker's labelled specimens, yielded upon drying (sun and subsequent artificial heat) a delicious tea.